



MEDIA RELEASE

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Oiled Wildlife Released But Absence of Legislation Leaves BC Wildlife Vulnerable

Wildlife impacted by the Burrard Inlet oil spill on July 4th are now ready for release back to the wild, but the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC (WRA) fears that thousands of impacted wildlife will die the next time if there is a major oil spill in B.C.

July's 1000-litre oil spill in Vancouver's Burrard Inlet left 52 rescued wild birds languishing in a temporary treatment facility for over a week, and more waiting to be rescued, because the company responsible, FFS Hong Kong Ltd., did not want to pay the full costs of rehabilitating the birds.

Despite the legal wrangling, Focus Wildlife, the oiled wildlife response team contracted to mount the rescue and rehabilitation effort, has continued to care for the animals at the company's own cost. The Focus and WRA team will release a number of the rehabilitated birds on Thursday, July 20th at 2:00 p.m., Cates Park in North Vancouver, B.C. We invite the media to attend.

In the absence of adequate national regulations that would force the Hong Kong-based company to pay, Dickie called on the federal government last week to cover the rehabilitation costs of the oiled birds.

Although the oiled birds are the responsibility of CWS under the Migratory Bird Act, the federal agency has refused to act, and even warned early this week that the recovering birds might still be euthanized. Despite the warning, CWS officials have continued banding those birds that have completed the rehabilitation process.

Late today, WRA was shocked to learn from Focus Wildlife that CWS will not pay, placing Focus Wildlife in a difficult position as the humane caregivers of the oiled birds. To this date, Focus Wildlife has continued to rehabilitate the rescued birds despite lack of government funds to pay their response team.

Janice Dickie, WRA's Executive Director, states that the lack of effective Canadian legislation requiring the responsible party to pay for oiled wildlife response puts BC wildlife at risk.

Dickie states, "I have no doubt that other shipping companies around the world are watching this case to see what, if any, protective measures for wildlife will be enforced by the Canadian government. The lack of effective legislation means that it is left to polluters to determine whether British Columbia wildlife is dispensable."

Over the last two weeks, WRA has been assisting Focus Wildlife in the response effort for wildlife. Focus Wildlife is an internationally respected company that offers oiled wildlife emergency response services around the world, mostly recently saving hundreds of wildlife while working with CN during Alberta's Lake Wabamun spill.

In the United States and Western European countries, oiled wildlife response costs must be paid for by the responsible party, and typically comprise one to ten percent of the overall oil cleanup costs. However, Dickie says that Canadians rely on corporate goodwill, as in the case of Lake Wabamun, where CN paid the full costs of the wildlife response effort without hesitation.

Dickie fears that BC will lose the services of expert oiled response teams like Focus Wildlife if polluters are not forced to pay. "We don't have much time to improve the Legislation," say Dickie. "The next big spill could oil thousands of birds or other species at risk, and we fear what will happen to them if BC's only oiled wildlife response specialists has left the province due to lack of government support."

In BC, dozens of minor spills in both the terrestrial and marine environments impact wildlife each year. WRA's wildlife rehabilitation centre admits an annual average of 3,200 injured, orphaned and pollution damaged wild animals.

Directions to Cates Park: From Vancouver, take the Trans Canada Highway into North Vancouver over the Second Narrows Bridge. Make an immediate right, and head East on Dollarton Highway for 5.3km. Proceed to boat ramp area.

The Wildlife Rescue Association of BC is a not-for-profit wildlife rehabilitation society located next to Burnaby Lake at 5216 Glencarin Drive.